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NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20546

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OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

NOV 17 1972

NASA Review Completed.

NRO review(s) completed.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Apollo 17 Earth Orbital Contingency Mission

- REFERENCES:** (1) January 18, 1972 Memo to Dr. Kissinger
from Dr. Fletcher, BYE 17471/72, Re: Apollo 16
Earth Orbital Contingency Mission.
- (2) Memo for Record from Mr. Peter Jessup,
dated 26 January 1972 (U), Re: Apollo 16
Earth Orbital Contingency Mission.

We are developing plans for an earth orbital contingency mission, as we have for previous Apollo missions, that would be implemented in the unlikely event that Apollo 17 achieves a successful earth orbit, but cannot continue to the moon. This earth orbital contingency mission would perform useful experimentation, including earth survey photography.

The Apollo 17 lunar mission, the last in the Apollo program, is scheduled to be launched at 9:53p.m. EST on 6 December, 1972. The photographic equipment on board is identical to that carried on Apollo 15 and 16. The only significant change from previous contingency missions which were approved by your office is that because of a night launch there will be little opportunity during the six and one half day mission to obtain photographic coverage of the United States. Proposed emphasis within the potential photographic coverage opportunities available will be on Spain, Ethiopia, South America, Central Australia, and Western and Northern Africa.

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You will note that orbits between 40°N and 40°S latitude will place the spacecraft over much of China and a small portion of the USSR. Lighting conditions will make some photography of these areas possible. While your office has not previously authorized photography of the Sino-Soviet Bloc from Apollo contingency missions, we note the following for your consideration:

1. There has now been an apparent advance in international acceptability of earth orbital photography with the successful operation of the ERTS-1 satellite. No objections were made to open reporting of this mission in the UN Outer Space Committee, and some 50 nations have actually proposed the use of ERTS photography for experiments. About 110 such experiments from 38 nations have so far been approved.
2. Satellite photography of the Sino-Soviet area would not in itself appear to establish a precedent since photographs have been taken of the Chinese area in Gemini missions and were published widely thereafter. Photography of Soviet land features has been obtained in US meteorological satellite programs. Some of this has been reproduced in Soviet publications. The new factor would, of course, be the higher resolution of the Apollo 17 photography, which will be in the 10-40 meter class.
3. The Soviet Union is now publicly conducting an earth orbital photography program and has publicly reported taking orbital photography outside of the Soviet Union, specifically mentioning Africa.

While there are no strong programmatic reasons for taking photographs of the Sino-Soviet areas, and ground truth will not be available, we think there is merit in continuing the

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practice of completely overt world-wide photographic coverage initiated with ERTS-1, and setting further precedent for Skylab photographic operations commencing next April. For these reasons we recommend approval of photography of these regions on an ad hoc basis when lighting conditions and a limited film load permit, and when appropriate geophysical features are in view of the astronauts. We do not wish to press the issue, but feel that the inherent pros and cons deserve careful consideration in light of possible impact on our planning for photographic operations for the Skylab mission in 1973. It should be noted, however, that the NRO, and we understand informally ACDA, have reservations.

In any event, should the Apollo earth orbital contingency mission be flown, we plan for a review of the imagery prior to any public release and dissemination.

We would appreciate being advised as soon as practicable if national policy considerations permit our extending photographic coverage to other geographic areas of the world, including the Sino-Soviet areas, in the unlikely event the Apollo 17 contingency mission is flown.

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NRO

James C. Fletcher
Administrator

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